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RECIPES FOR COOKING MUSKRAT MEAT

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Now that meat is scarce Americans will be buying more poultry and domestic rabbit. Some will try muskrat. "Marsh rabbit," as muskrat is sometimes called, was highly esteemed by the aborigines of North America, especially in winter. The voyageurs, trappers, and hunters ate it roasted over the coals of the camp fire. Traders and Indians also dried the meat for winter food.

In recent years persons of refined taste also have eaten the flesh of the muskrat and relished it. Some have declared that it is game worthy of an epicure, with a flavor somewhat like the wild duck that has been shot in the same marsh where it has fed. Its flavor has also been likened to that of the famous terrapin of the Chesapeake Bay.

Musk rats are sold extensively in some of the markets of the East. In Washington, Baltimore, St. Louis, Wilmington, and Philadelphia they are sold as "marsh rabbits" but no attempt is made to conceal the fact that they are muskrats. They are bought and eaten by all classes of people. Musk rats can be purchased cheaply as they are trapped for their fur and the additional labor of preparing the meat for market is slight. Muskrat is a favorite dish at dinners given by church societies in Delaware, Maryland, and New Jersey, and an annual muskrat banquet is a feature with certain gun clubs in the East and West.

The muskrat is principally a vegetarian and feeds on the roots and stems of aquatic plants, such as cattails, sedges, bulrushes, wild rice, pond lillies, and water weed. Fresh muskrat meat is available during the open trapping seasons in the various States. This period in the individual States extends from November to April, depending upon the State laws.

The flesh of muskrat is dark red in color, but fine grained and tender. Prejudice against the meat results usually from lack of skill in cooking or from carelessness in skinning the animal. The musk glands

often come off with the skin, and only in the summer does the musky odor pervade the flesh. Care should be taken to avoid cutting into the musk glands, and any subcutaneous glands that may adhere to the meat should be trimmed off.

The carcass should be soaked over night in slightly salted cold water to draw out the blood and reduce the gamy flavor. Weak vinegar also will reduce the "wild" taste and tends to make the meat more tender. In place of the latter, a pinch of baking soda is frequently used.

Young muskrats, like young rabbits, can be cooked by the quick methods of frying or broiling. The carcasses of older animals need longer, slower cooking. They are excellent served in fricasses, casserole dishes, muskrat pie, croquettes, chop suey, and other ways adapted to mature meat. The recipes given here are typical of the many suitable for cooking this meat and when so prepared it is highly palatable.

Fried Muskrat

Disjoint and cut into desired pieces, parboil for twenty minutes, then drain and wipe with damp cloth. Fry plain in a heavy skillet, or, if preferred, in a smooth batter made by beating one egg yolk with a half cup of milk, adding three-fourths of a teaspoonful of salt, and stirring in a half cup of flour. Dip the pieces into the batter until well-coated and drop into hot fat. As soon as the meat is browned, reduce the heat and cook slowly until tender.

Serve on hot platter and garnish with parsley. A rich, brown gravy can be made by using flour stirred into the pan drippings, adding a little water or milk and cooking until thickened.

Wine-fried Muskrat

Soak overnight in slightly salted water. Drain and boil in fresh water until tender. Pick meat off of bones and fry in shortening. As this is frying, pour over a little sweet wine. Sherry wine is generally used. Some prefer to serve on hot platter and then pour over the wine to flavor.

Broiled Marsh Rabbit

Clean and wash the carcass and then wipe with a damp cloth. Butter thoroughly, then brush with a thin mixture of vinegar and mustard. Dust well with prepared poultry seasoning, place in broiler and broil for twenty minutes.

Smothered Muskrat

After soaking overnight, drain and parboil for twenty minutes. Heat some sausage or bacon drippings in thick skillet and sear meat in it.

Season with salt, pepper and chopped onion. Sprinkle with flour and add a little water. Then cover and allow to simmer until thoroughly done.

Maryland Potted or Baked Muskrat

Soak two muskrats overnight, drain and cut into pieces. Pour boiling water over meat, stir thoroughly and drain. Place in thick frying pan or iron pot, add a little water, a pod of red pepper or a half teaspoonful of red cayenne, cover and bake in a moderately hot oven until tender. Season with salt and pepper to taste, add a little sage, and four table-spoonfuls of bacon or sausage drippings. If desired, a generous piece of washed salt pork can be used instead. Sprinkle flour over top and baste several times until well-browned.

Enough potatoes for the meal can be added and cooked with the meat or the dish can be served as desired with diced, buttered white or sweet potatoes, peas or carrots.

Muskrat a la Terrapin

Boil the meat in slightly salted water for about an hour or until tender but firm. Discard this cooking water. Pick the meat off and cut into small pieces. Cover the bones with cold water and let simmer and then add this juice to the meat. Do not use the water in which the carcass was boiled at first.

For each muskrat used hard-cook three or four eggs. Mash the yolks with two tablespoonfuls of butter, stir until smooth, add a level table-spoonful of mustard, a tablespoonful of flour, and about one half cup of cream. Add the chopped egg whites and pepper and salt to taste. Then add all of this to the muskrat meat and cook about fifteen to twenty minutes until thick. Before serving add a glassful of sherry wine.

Michigan Special

After soaking overnight, disjoint and cut into pieces, put into fresh water and parboil for five minutes. Drain and rinse the carcasses with warm water. Place in a roaster and cover with canned corn and a little water or milk (use two cans of corn to three muskrats). Add salt and pepper, three medium-sized onions, and two tablespoonfuls of butter. Place in a hot oven and stir the pieces as they brown. Bake about two and a half hours or until the meat is well-done.

Layered Muskrat Meat and Corn

Soak overnight in slightly salted water, drain and discard this water. Parboil for twenty minutes in fresh water seasoned with a little celery, onions, salt, and pepper to flavor. Pick off meat and then place in casserole layered with canned crushed corn (a layer of corn and then a layer of meat) topped off with the corn. Add a little milk, place in

oven and bake until cooked and properly browned on top.

Marsh Hare a'la Louisianne

Disjoint and soak legs of muskrats in vinegar for thirty minutes or more. Remove from vinegar, salt and pepper well, and place in hot cooking oil and brown. Then remove to another pot filled with about two quarts of hot water. Chop fine a piece of celery, parsnip, and a small head of garlic. Brown chopped seasoning in the cooking oil in which meat was browned, add two cans of Delmonte sauce, and cook on slow fire for five minutes. Pour this sauce back into pot with the legs and cook over low heat until done, adding salt and pepper to taste, a teaspoonful of sugar, and a few sprigs of bayleaf.

Muskrats German Style (Pickled Muskrats)

Place whole carcass (minus the head) in crock or glass container in solution of a cup of water and a cup of cider vinegar with a tablespoonful of salt, mixed spices, and bayleaf. Let stand in a cold place for at least twenty-four and preferably forty-eight hours. Then simmer in the same mixture until tender. Remove meat, strain off the spices and bayleaf, and thicken the liquid with flour and water to the desired consistency.

This dish is best served with potato dumplings. To make these dumplings fry a medium-sized onion in two tablespoons of fat and then pour over four cups of diced bread and mix by hand. Add one cup of mashed potatoes and mix thoroughly. Then add two raw eggs and a half cup of flour and salt to taste. Lightly fashion into large balls and drop into boiling water in an uncovered pot or kettle for twenty minutes. Serve with brown gravy.

Muskrat Meat Patties

Soak overnight in slightly salted water. Drain and discard this water and parboil in fresh water until tender. Pick the meat off, run through meat grinder if desired, season with salt, pepper and onion, then mix with small amount of bread crumbs and fashion into patties. Dip patties into well-beaten egg, dip in crumbs, and fry in deep fat until brown.

Muskrat Salad

After soaking overnight in salted water, drain and boil in fresh water, seasoned with salt and pepper for flavoring, until meat is tender but firm. Pick meat off, cut into small pieces and prepare as with chicken or other meat salad. With Mayonnaise only added it can be used as a very tasty sandwich spread.

Stewed Muskrat Liver

Care must be taken to remove all gall bladders. Soak the livers overnight in fresh water. Simmer for ten minutes, draw off the water and then simmer again with a small piece of salt pork added. Then salt and pepper to taste, add sliced onion, and stew down, thickening the liquid with a little flour.

Muskrat liver is somewhat grainy. It tastes quite like that of chicken and is much relished.

Preserving Muskrat Meat

During the trapping season the wives of trappers and farmers living on or near marsh areas where muskrats are produced preserve the meat for extra use. This is accomplished by applying proper home preserving methods and putting the meat in glass or earthen jars.

A favorite method used in the muskrat sections of the country is to parboil the meat, fry it lightly, and then pack it tightly in glass, fruit, or earthen jars. Melted fat should then be poured over it until it covers the meat about one-quarter of an inch, in the same manner as country sausage is commonly preserved.

The quick-freezing method and the locker service inaugurated by ice and refrigerating companies have made it possible to develop still further the preservation of muskrat meat. The usual procedure is to blanch or lightly parboil the meat, wrap it in special waxed paper and then quick freeze it. This is a sound conservation practice.